

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of the claims in the application:

1.-7. (Cancelled)

8. (New) A map search system, comprising:

a map data storing unit for storing a plurality of information items, wherein the plurality of information items are stored by being divided into a plurality of search areas;

a designating unit for designating one of the plurality of search areas as a target search area for retrieval;

a retrieving unit for retrieving an information item, only within the target search area;

a switching-information storing unit for storing a plurality of switching-information items with which the plurality of search areas are associated; and

a search-area switching unit for switching the target search area from a certain search area previously designated by the designating unit into a given search area associated with a given switching-information item, when the given switching-information item is designated by an input item.

9. (New) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the plurality of switching-information items include information items that indicate areas, each of which is capable of designating one of the plurality of search areas.

10. (New) The map search system of Claim 8, further comprising:

an address-book storing unit for storing at least names that relate to positions and are associated with the plurality of switching-information items,

wherein the search-area switching unit switches the target search area from the certain search area into the given search area based on a switching-information item associated with one of the names that is inputted.

11. (New) The map search system of Claim 8, further comprising:

a communicating unit for communicating with a portable storage medium that includes an address-book storing unit for storing at least names that relate to positions and are associated with the plurality of switching-information items,

wherein the search-area switching unit switches the target search area from the certain search area into the given search area based on a switching-information item associated with one of the names that is inputted.

12. (New) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the search-area switching unit includes a notifying unit for notifying that the target search area is switched from the certain search area into the given search area when the given switching-information item is designated by an input item.

13. (New) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the search-area switching unit switches back the target search area from the given search area into the certain search area after a given period of time.

14. (New) The map search system of Claim 8,

wherein the map search system is adapted to a car navigation device.

15. (New) A search area designating method used in a map search system that stores (i) a plurality of information items, wherein the plurality of information items are stored by being divided into a plurality of search areas, and (ii) a plurality of switching-information items with which the plurality of search areas are associated,

the search area designating method comprising:

designating a certain search area of the plurality of search areas as a target search area for retrieval;

switching the target search area from the designated certain search area into a given search area associated with a given switching-information item, when the given switching-information item is designated by an input item; and

retrieving an information item, only within the target search area.